

Erie Canal

INTRODUCTION

Waterways have long been a primary means of transportation. The use of waterways such as the Erie Canal has influenced exploration, commerce, and daily passage. Upstate New York, a region rich in lakes and rivers, was transformed by the development the Erie Canal. Completed in 1819, the Erie Canal created a navigable path from the Atlantic Ocean to the system of Great Lakes. This allowed for the easy and quick transport of goods, animals, and people. With 18 aqueducts, 83 locks, and rising 568 feet from the Hudson River to Lake Erie, the Erie Canal was the marvel of its time. Explore the Erie Canal and how it transformed the way goods and people were transported between the Hudson River and Lake Erie through the “Syracuse & Chenango Valley Railroad” map and a sketch of the “Original Stone Bridge over the Erie Canal at Salina Street, 1818.”

GRADES 3-5 MATERIALS

- » Primary Source Documents: A map and a sketch.
- » Recent Map of Onondaga and Madison County.
- » Teacher’s key.

STANDARDS

NY State Standard 1: History of the United States and New York

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in the history of the United States and New York.

NY State Standard 3: Geography

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the geography of the interdependent world in which we live—local, national, and global—including the distribution of people, places, and environments over the Earth’s surface.

Common Core: CC.4.SL.1

Comprehension and Collaboration: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Common Core: CC.4.SL.1.d

Comprehension and Collaboration: Review the key ideas expressed and explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.

AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner: 2.1.1

Continue an inquiry-based research process by applying critical thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation, organization) to information and knowledge in order to construct new understandings, draw conclusions, and create new knowledge.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Using primary sources related to the Erie Canal, students will:

- » Learn about primary sources, what they are and how to interpret them in order to help understand the past.
- » See how the Erie Canal's route and means of transportation have changed from the past to the present.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment should be largely based on the student's ability to:

- » Decipher primary source documents.
- » Engage positively with others' ideas and opinions.
- » Expand their thinking about the history of transportation and translate that knowledge into a map.

Students should engage their critical thinking skills while working collaboratively. Students should contribute to the class discussion and be able to reflect upon the process of deciphering a map and a sketch.

GETTING STARTED

- » Explain that primary sources are original documents that tell us about the historical moments in which they were created. Ask the following questions: How can you tell that you are looking, touching, or listening to a primary source? What is a secondary source? Explain that secondary sources are interpretations of primary sources.
- » Introduce the skill of the lesson. In this lesson students will use primary sources to help understand why the Erie Canal was built in the state of New York and what purpose it served. They will also learn information about the characteristics of the Erie Canal, the people and cargo that traveled on it, and the tools used to navigate it. Students will compare different forms of transportation in use when the canal was built.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION

1. Show the sketch of the "Original Stone Bridge over the Erie Canal at Salina Street, 1818" and the map of the "Syracuse and Chenango Valley Railroad." If desired, provide students with individual copies of the primary source documents.
2. Begin a class discussion based on the students' observations of the primary source documents. Point out the type of boat traveling under the bridge and the characteristics of the canal itself as shown in the drawing of the "Original Stone Bridge." (See Teacher's Notes). On the map of the railroad, point out the compass rose (upper right corner) and the legend (lower left corner). Then direct the students' attention to the dates listed for each revision made on the original map. Ask: Why are the compass rose and legend important parts of maps? What do they tell you? Which cities does the Erie Canal run through? Looking at the map's legend, what do the symbols +++++ and ----- and ——— and ===== represent? From Syracuse to Manlius, what other types of transportation run parallel to the Erie Canal? What other bodies of water do these types of transportation run near or next to? Why do you think the Syracuse and Chenango Railroad was built near the Erie Canal? Do you think the Erie Canal is still used today the same way it was when it was built in 1819? Why would someone build a bridge, like the one depicted in the "Original Stone Bridge" over the Erie Canal? Do you think there are more or less bridges over the Erie Canal today? How can we figure this out?

3. Give each student a copy of the recent map of Onondaga and Madison County. Have the students compare the map of the “Syracuse and Chenango Valley Railroad” with the present day map. Break students into small groups. Have each group critically analyze the two maps. Ask the students to draw where they think the Erie Canal would flow on the recent map of Onondaga and Madison County. Once they have sketched their version of the Erie Canal, have them draw the course of the Syracuse & Chenango Valley Railroad on the same map. *Ask students:* Do you think there are more bridges crossing the Erie Canal today than when the “Syracuse and Chenango Valley Railroad” map was created? Why or why not? What other major bodies of water do you see? Where do the railroad and the Erie Canal cross paths? Alternatively, teachers may supplement the current Syracuse map for ZeeMaps. (See Teacher’s Notes).

TEACHER’S NOTES

1. Observations taken from the sketch of the stone bridge over the canal can range from topics such as boat size, canal size, what the canal appears to be made out of, why the canal was made. These are examples that can help spark discussion with the students.
2. There were two main types of boats used on the Erie Canal. The first was the “Packet Boat” also known as “Packets” which were largely used to transport people along the canal. These boats ranged in size; however, the average packet was 60-80 feet long and 14 feet wide. They included modest but decent living accommodations including a kitchen, dining room, common area, and sleeping area that had different sections for men and women. The ticket price for packet boats was 4 cents a mile and included meals and sleeping accommodations. The second type of boat was called a “line boat” and this was primarily used for the transport of material goods. However, if a passenger could not afford the packet boat rates, they could be transported on a line boat for 1-2 cents a mile. These boats were significantly less comfortable.
3. If the teacher chooses, a Web 2.0 tool, such as ZeeMaps, which allows students to look at a modern map and make annotations. The best way to use this tool in relation to this project is to have students look at the railroad map and other sources about the Erie Canal and create the Erie Canal route on the ZeeMap. The use of this web tool can also spark discussion about the differences in technology used to create maps (computer versus hand-drawn) and how accurate the sketched maps were.

REFLECTION AND SHARING

- » Have the students share what they have learned about the Erie Canal and about deciphering a map.
- » Create a bar graph on the board to see who would rather travel on a flat boat on the Erie Canal, a railroad car, or on land via horse and carriage during the early 1800s. Have students briefly explain why they chose the preferred method of travel.

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"ORIGINAL STONE BRIDGE OVER THE ERIE CANAL
AT SALINA STREET, 1818"

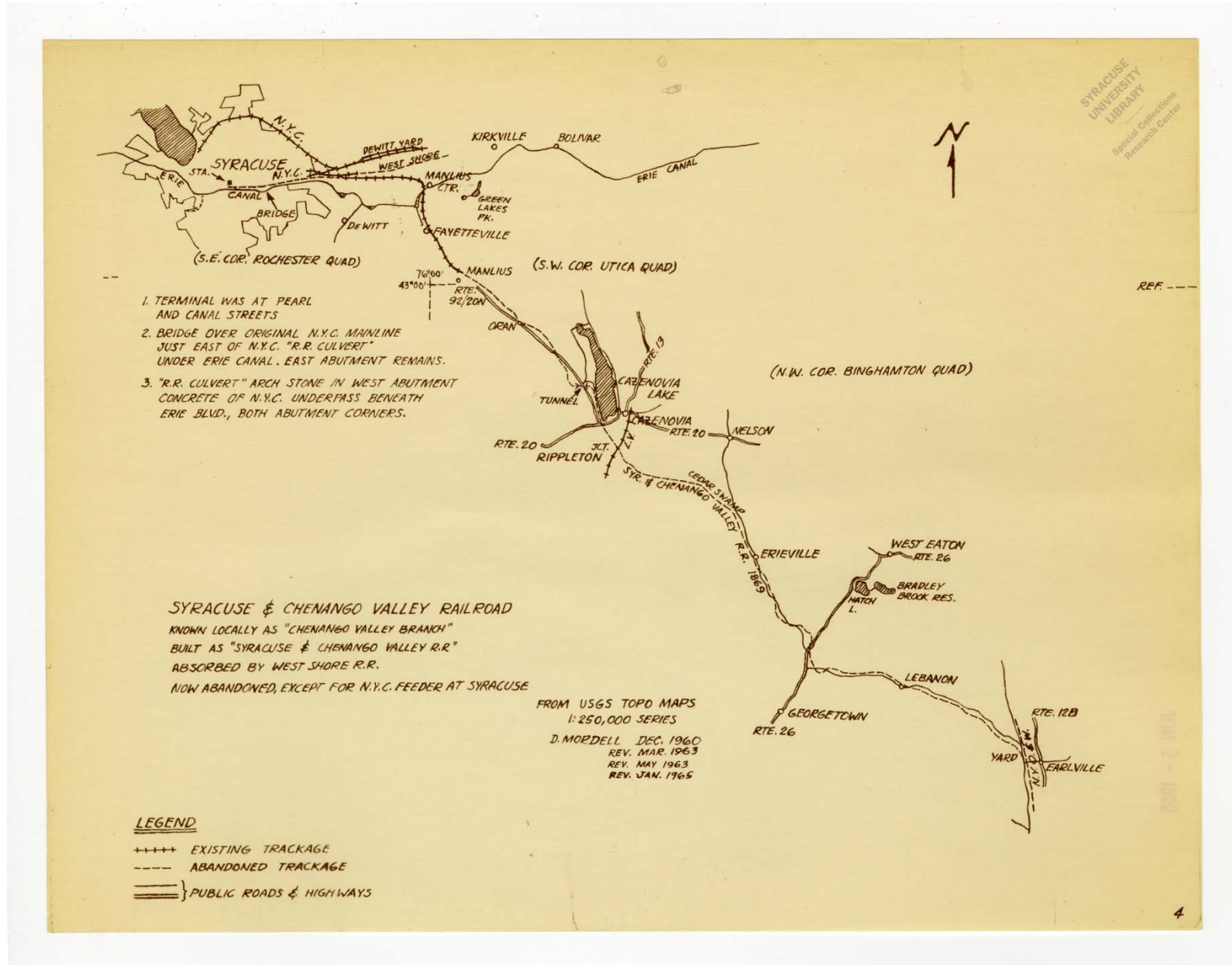
(FROM A SKETCH BY M.W. HANCHETT, 1899) p. 299

SKETCHED FROM
"PIONEER TIMES IN THE ONONDAGA COUNTRY"
by CARROLL E. SMITH, LL.D., SYRACUSE, N.Y.

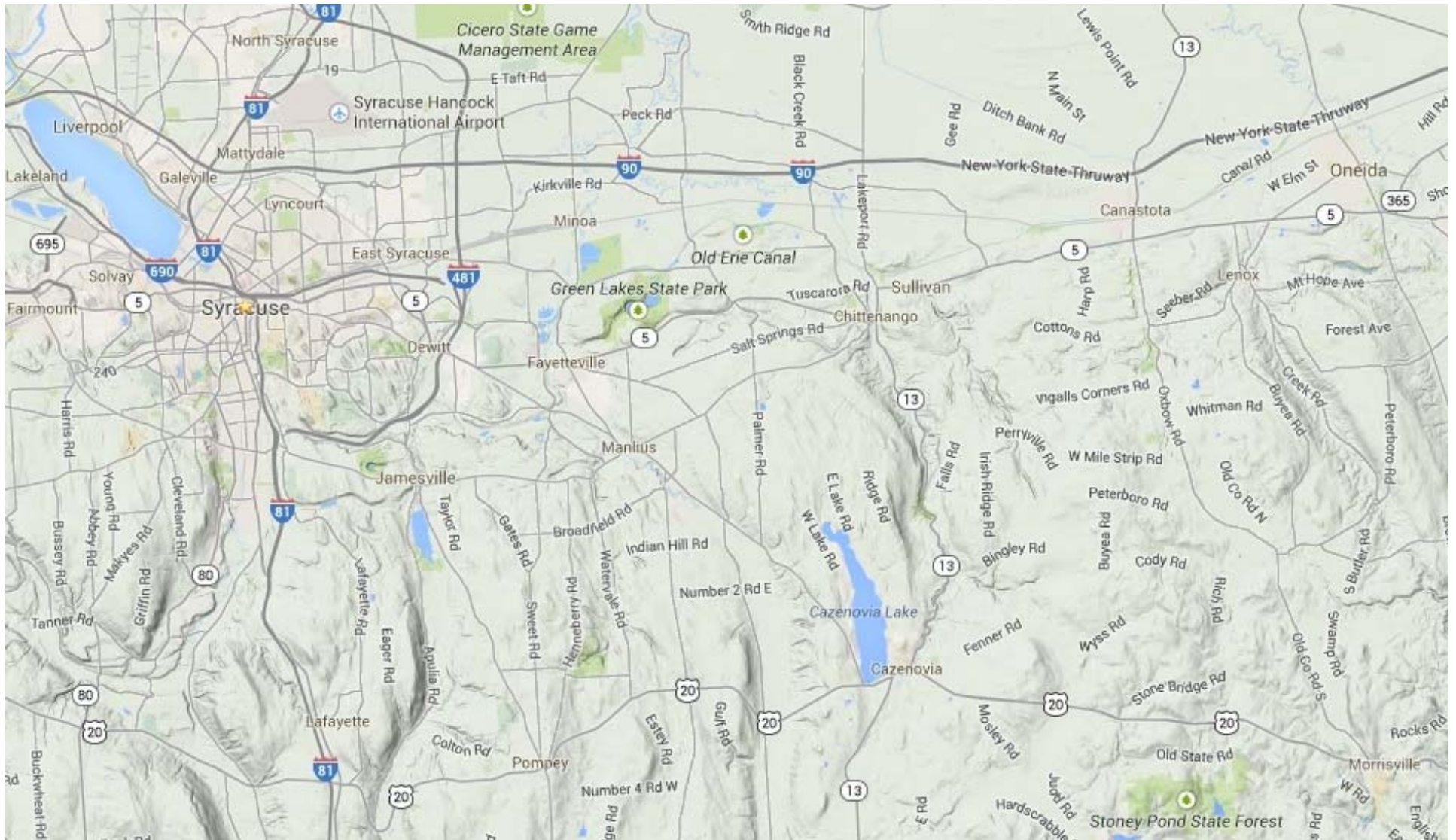
D.J. MORDELL JANUARY, 1964

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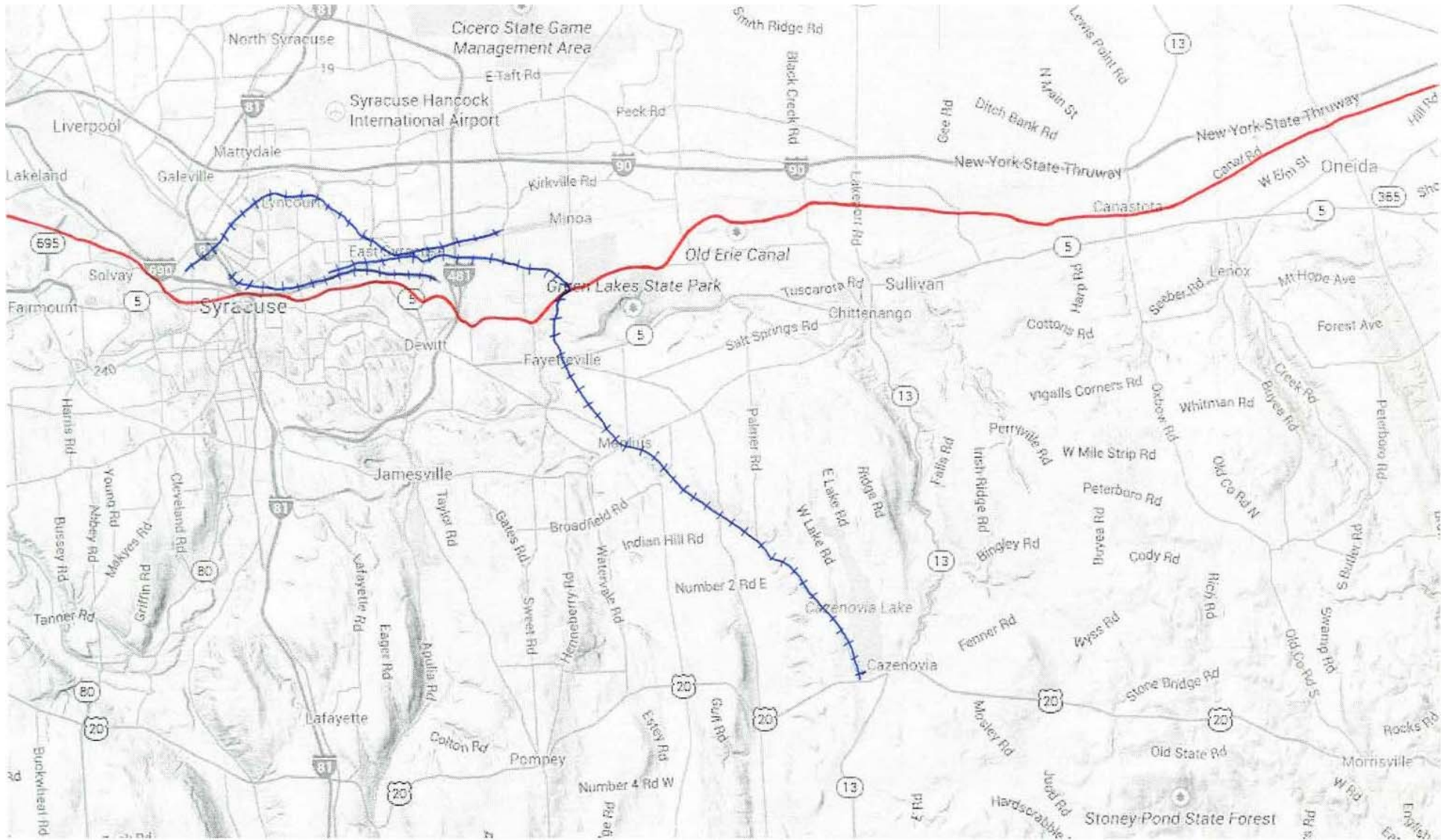
D.J. Mordell, "Original Stone Bridge over the Erie Canal at Salina Street, 1818," January 1964,
David J. Mordell Maps, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries.



D. Mordell, "Syracuse and Chenango Valley Railroad," December 1960, David J. Mordell Maps, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries.



Terrain map of Onondaga and Madison County, New York, May 2014, Google Maps.



Key of the Syracuse and Chenango Valley Railroad and the Erie Canal on a terrain map of Onondaga and Madison County, New York, May 2014, Google Maps

Blue: Syracuse and Chenango Valley Railroad. Red: Erie Canal.